

American University of Afghanistan

Project Summary

Subsector	Higher Education
Location	Kabul, Afghanistan
Project Cost	\$553,000
Project Type	Feasibility Study
Project Executing Firm/Agency	Ministry of Higher Education
Financing Agency	U.S. Trade and Development Agency



Project Outline

The Ministry of Higher Education is taking steps to coordinate the creation of a private American-style university in Kabul. Minister Sharief Fayez is working with the Coordinating Council for International Universities (CCIU) to plan the foundation of a university, which would be named The American University of Afghanistan (AUA).

The Ministry of Higher Education cites four reasons to establish this type of university. First, as a part of Afghan society, the university will help develop and provide the crucial educated human resource base necessary for the long-term development of the country. Second, it will provide a means of engaging civil society and the private sector in developing higher education. Third, it will set an example in terms of governance and academic standards for the education system. Finally, it will result in the creation of a modern facility in a prominent location in Kabul.

Technical Description

USTDA has recently provided a grant for a feasibility study to examine strategic issues, capital requirements and produce a detailed implementation plan. The feasibility study will address a range of issues including long-term financial sustainability; appropriate curriculum, staffing, and technology requirements; Afghan partnerships and governance mechanisms, including; site establishment; maintenance; security; environmental issues; quality assurance and accreditation; and institutional management concerns. CCIU has formed partnerships with highly experienced and well-regarded entities to carry out the feasibility study including the Academy for Educational Development, the Center for International Education, and the Development Assistance of Indiana University.

Planning for the proposed AUA recognizes the many difficulties faced in Afghanistan. The study will apply due diligence to the risks involved and make recommendations regarding the implementation process.

Final decisions on the university's initial curricular design will depend on the findings from a careful study of both factor and product markets for the new institution. This market study will occur as the first phase of the overall feasibility study and will critically shape decisions on whether to focus the initial curriculum at the secondary school, bachelor degree or sub-bachelor levels. Many of the other American style universities in the region operate at two or all three of these levels simultaneously. If the market study finds that the prospects for operating a successful undergraduate program *in the near term* are too limited to justify immediately creating an undergraduate university, the curriculum will be adjusted accordingly. Such an outcome would not abandon the long-term goal of creating a university. Instead it would begin a process of creating a university with an initial investment in an institution that would begin to operate at the secondary and/or post-secondary levels below the bachelor level. Such an institution could focus on certificate, diploma and/or associate degree courses in high-demand skill areas such as English language or business administration. And/or it could prepare students for direct entry to occupations in targeted sectors such as agriculture, business or computers and information technology.

Project Site

The project will require the acquisition of suitable land in Kabul. The Afghan Government has expressed to CCIU its intention to donate land to the university and is currently considering options.

Project Status/Timeline

It is planned that the full feasibility study will begin in mid-2003 and be completed in about 10 months. The board of trustees will be created and a “precursor” course of intensive training in English language and other study skills will be launched. The actual investment project will begin in 2004 and be completed in five years. Recruitment of core staff will begin soon after the conclusion of the feasibility study. Freshman level academic programs will be launched in March of either 2004 or 2005. Higher years of study will be added each year to complete the four-year undergraduate curriculum. Course offerings will be broadened thereafter. Instruction will start in existing or remodeled facilities and construction will begin in 2004.

Equipment and Services

The university will need the following physical and electronic infrastructure:

- Classrooms
- Laboratories
- Auditoria
- Administrative and communal facilities
- Staff and student housing
- Distance learning capacity
- Wireless data network
- Digital library
- Video-streaming of lectures and seminars
- Computers

The feasibility study will determine whether new or remodeled facilities are more cost-effective. It will also recommend and estimate cost-effective and aesthetically suitable options for construction, rehabilitation, or remodeling.

Operational resources needed. The chief inputs for an educational institution are human: faculty, staff, and students. In addition, modern universities require information and communication technologies. These include digital libraries, distance teaching, and electronic networks and databases for use in instruction and research as well as institutional management. With respect to human resources, like other American-style universities abroad, this one will encompass a highly diverse group of nationalities among faculty, staff, and students. Afghans, including returnees, are very likely to make up a majority of the student body. However, in the early years, there will likely be a large component of non-Afghans, especially Americans, among the faculty and staff.

To the extent circumstances permit, the university will incorporate modern technologies in its design. Particular attention will be given to the use of an appropriate combination of distance learning (DL) methods suitable to the learning environment and security situation in Afghanistan. These would include the use of e-learning software, existing

course content in DL format, and the new DL Center established by the World Bank Institute and the Global Development Learning Network in Kabul.

U.S. Competitiveness

Given that the project is to be named the American University of Afghanistan, that instruction will be in English, and that the goal of the project is American-style education, competition among education service suppliers will be limited. US-based suppliers of goods and services in this market should be competitive. Depending on the size of the AUA investment project, the U.S. export potential for the project could range between \$7.0 to 14.0 million in goods and services. Service exports will come in large part from American academic institutions. Construction issues depend on the findings of the feasibility study. Where possible, local materials and crews will be utilized. It is likely that U.S. based expertise will be required to ensure compliance with appropriate environmental regulations and to ensure that engineering and construction meets world-class standards.

Project Financing

Once the feasibility study is completed, medium- and long-term funding will be sought from financial institutions. These include the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), as well as private and public donors.

The capital cost of initiating the university during a five-year project implementation period is expected to be in the range of \$15.0 to 20.0 million dollars. Capital costs will include creating governance and management systems, appointment of core academic and administrative staff, design and initiation of core undergraduate course offerings, initiation of distance learning systems, accessing digital libraries, construction and/or remodeling of facilities, and recruitment of students, plus contingencies.

Conclusion

The AUA will develop Afghanistan's human capital base. Its graduates, and the institution itself, will support the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan through a broad range of benefits that will include a core of skilled, highly trained Afghans who can use the English language and will reinvest their skills in the reconstruction and development of the country. The university will provide a best-practice model for operating a higher education institution in Afghanistan—self-sustaining and independent. Joint governance will further encourage relationships

between U.S. and Afghan leadership and set standards for the enhancement of civil society.

Key Decision Makers

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